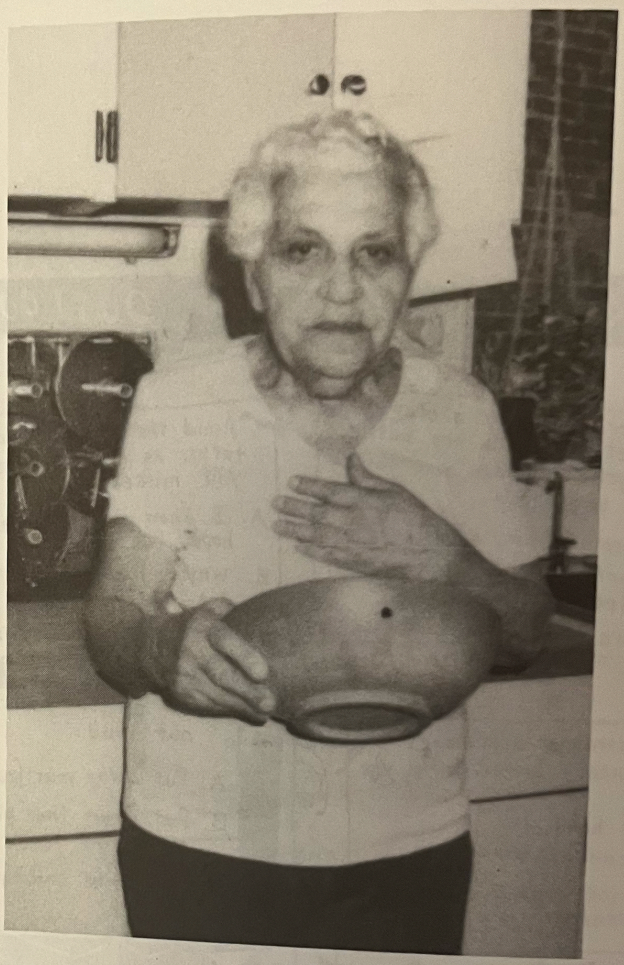
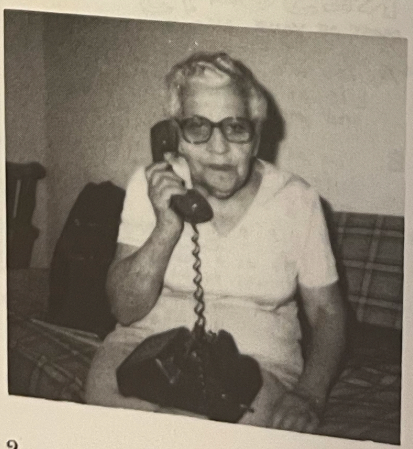
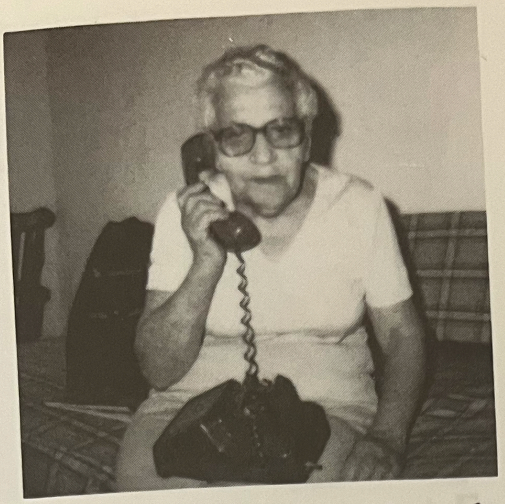
Morsels and Memories

My late mother's 21 steps to the proper preparation of gefilte fish.





1 Two weeks before a major Jewish holiday, call your daughter and ask her what she plans to serve at the festive meal. Express your outrage when she suggests serving doctored up canned gefilte fish. Offer to make the fish yourself.

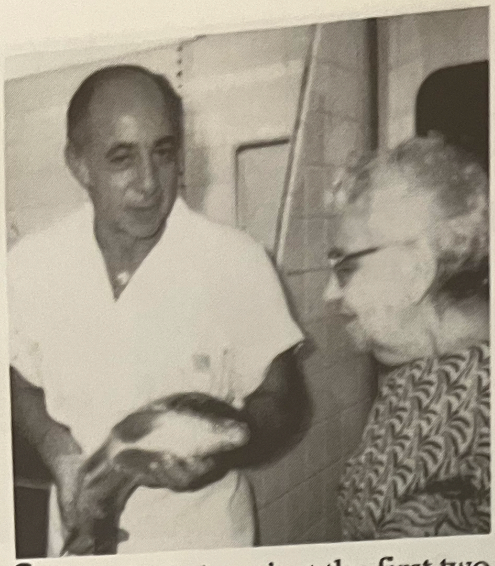


2 Suggest that your daughter take a day off from work so that she can watch you make the fish, so she'll know how to do it for her kids after she has put you in The Home. Two days before the holiday, call your daughter and tell her you hate to disappoint her, but you simply don't have the strength to make gefilte fish.

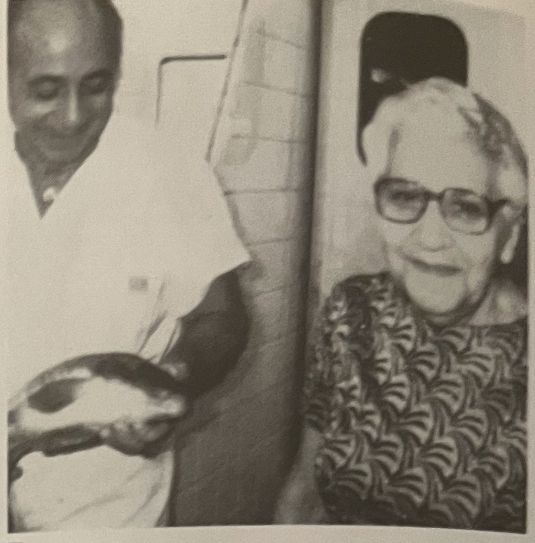
3 While your daughter is racing all over looking for a substitute appetizer, get all dressed up and take a bus . . . and a subway . . . and another bus . . .

4 . . . to an obscure fish store in a slum where they still sell LIVE CARP.

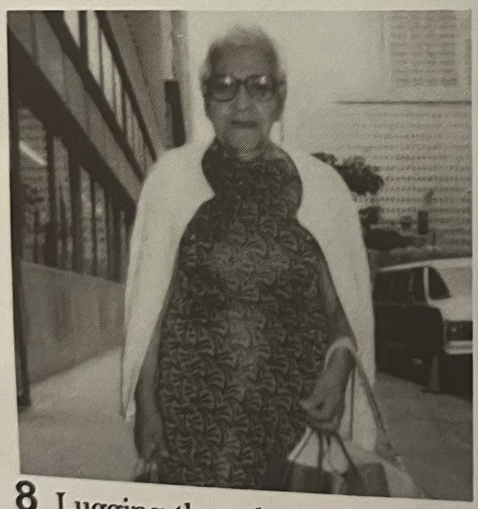
5 Examine the carp swimming around in the fish tank. Ask the owner if any fresher carp will be arriving soon.



6 On principle, reject the first two fish that he offers you.



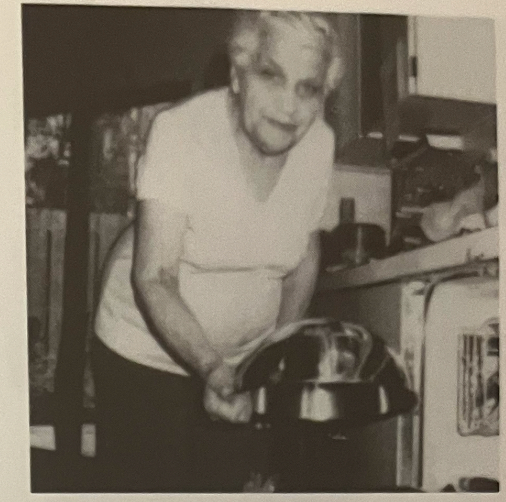
7 Accept the third or fourth. Allow him to fillet and skin the carp, but NEVER let him put your fish near his electric grinder. Far be it for you to accuse anyone unjustly, but you know he has ground dead carp in it.



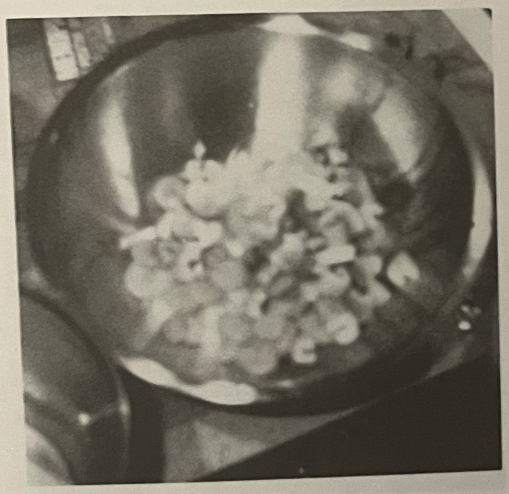
8 Lugging three heavy shopping bags filled with fish, take three buses home, unless someone has told you about a way of taking four.

9 Call your daughter and tell her that you felt a little bit better and decided to go to your special fish store and pick up the carp. You know how busy she is right before the holidays so you didn't want to ask her to drive all the way out there.

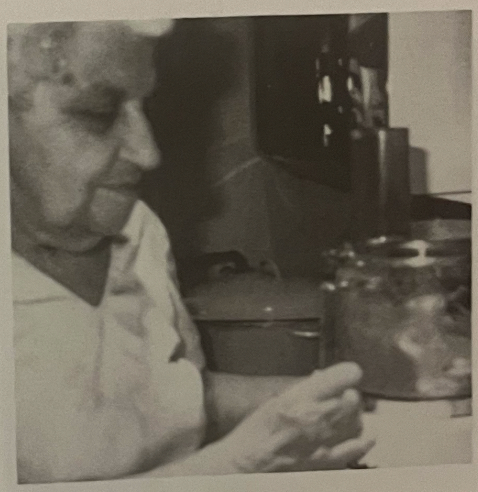
10 Tell her how exhausted you are and describe in detail the assassin who tried to steal your pocketbook as you were boarding the second bus. Inquire whether your daughter would mind picking you up. You wouldn't normally ask, but it's much easier to make the gefilte fish in her kitchen because she has all the latest electric gadgets.



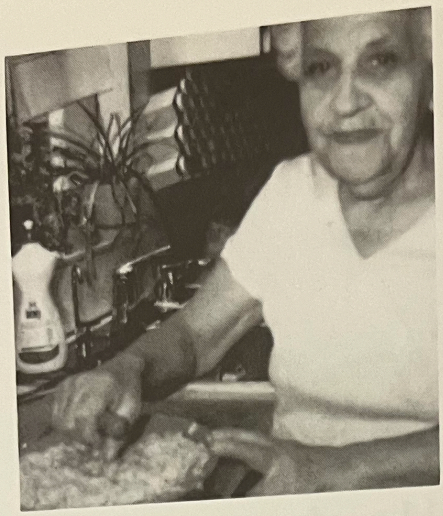
11 Remove several washed mixing bowls from your daughter's dishwasher and rinse them to make sure they are clean.



12 There should be a separate bowl for each ingredient so that dirt from the carrots will not get on the celery. Put the diced carrots in one bowl, the sliced celery in the second, the chopped onions in the third and then combine them all in a fourth bowl. Ask your daughter to stop whatever she's doing and come and watch you.

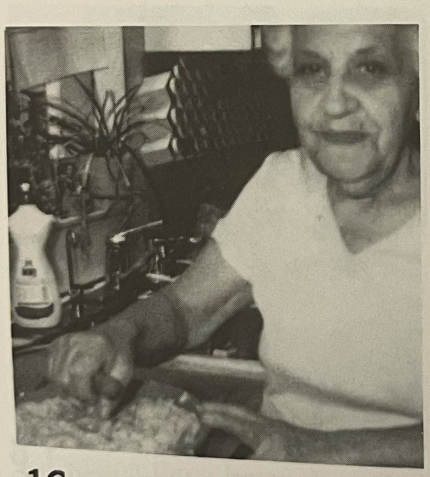


13 Eye your daughter's food processor with suspicion. Ask her to help you operate it. Chop the carp in it for 15 seconds, then move all the ingredients into your ancient wooden chopping bowl.

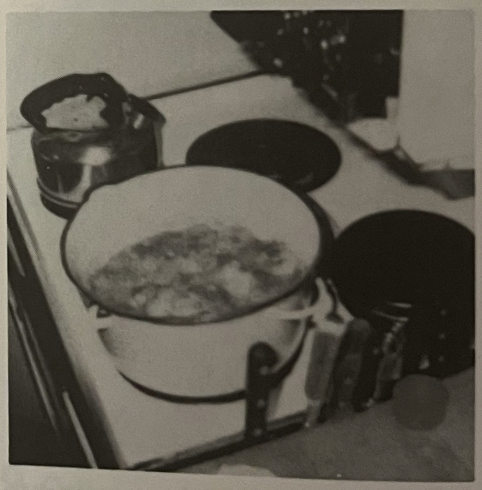


14 Rev up those Hadassah arms and attack the ingredients with a dull bladed *hockmesser* for 90 minutes. Demand that your daughter acknowledge the superiority of your withered arm over a horsepower motor.

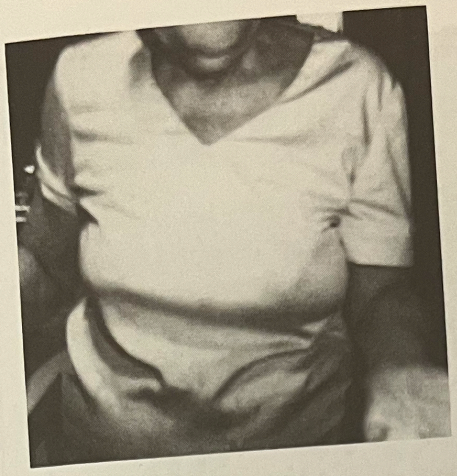
15 Place your hand on your chest and moan. Accept your daughter's offer to help. Give her the bowl and the *hockmesser.*



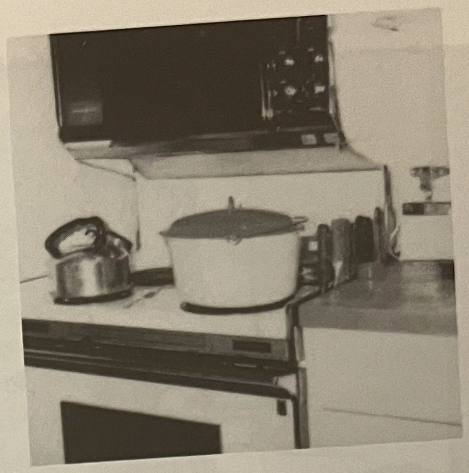
16 Twelve seconds later, snatch the bowl and chopper out of your daughter's hands. Tell her to watch carefully so she'll be more of a help next year. Pulverize the fish with your chopper for another 52 minutes.



17 On the bottom of a cast-iron pot with a non-matching lid (rescued by your mother during a pogrom and brought in steerage to America), arrange slices of carrots, onions, celery, fish heads, skin and bones.

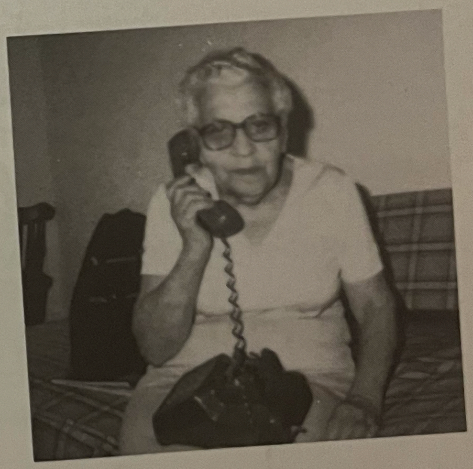


18 Form the chopped fish mush into oval patties and lay them gently on top of the ingredients in the pot.



19 Add liquid and seasonings, bring to a boil, lower to simmer, cover the pot and let the fish cook until they're ready and taste good . . . but not as good as last year's.

20 After the patties cool, arrange them on a beautiful serving platter for your daughter and her guests. Dump the heads, skin and bones in a chipped soup bowl for yourself. Practice saying that the heads and the bones are the tastiest portions until you sound convincing.



21 The morning after the holiday, call your daughter and tell her that you just tasted a piece of bottled fish that was even more delicious than what she served last night. Tell her it's a shame she made it from scratch when everyone does such wonderful things with canned.

MYRA CHANIN